

## **Script: Electronic Fieldtrip – Belle of Louisville**

**Kelli Burton**

### ***ALL ABOARD***

Welcome to the *Belle of Louisville*! It's a beautiful day, so hop on board. We're about to embark on a special adventure. What makes the *Belle of Louisville* so special? For one thing, she is almost one hundred years old. This popular riverboat was built in 1914 and is the oldest of her kind. And unlike modern boats, the Belle is powered by steam. That's why we call her a steamboat. More on that in a bit...but first thing's first. Let's cast-off!

The deck hands handle the lines during the disembarking of the Belle. They work together with the other crew members to make sure the steamboat leaves and returns safely. It takes an entire team of people to operate a steamboat. During our trip today, you will have the chance to meet some of them. We'll also give you a bit of fascinating history about this impressive riverboat.

Traveling on the river is certainly exciting. And people have been doing it for many years. Let's go back to a time when cars, trains and airplanes did not exist. Instead, people traveled by way of boat--on our country's mighty river system.

In the late seventeen hundreds the United States enjoyed it's new independence. During that time keelboats and flatboats were the main form of river transportation. These boats carried passengers, as well as goods, from town to town. Early pioneers used the river's natural current to push them downstream. But without power, they could not **easily** sail upstream. So, how did they return home? Well, they couldn't...not while transporting heavy cargo. They had to leave their boats down river and walk back home. Some of them may have been lucky enough to catch a ride on horseback.

One trail, from New Orleans to Louisville, took three or four months to travel by foot! This was a problem. And steamboats were the answer.

### ***STEAM***

You may be wondering who invented the steamboat. Often, many people mistake Robert Fulton **(as)** being the original inventor of the steamboat. But it was actually John Fitch. John Fitch lived a very interesting life. For a while, he made clocks for a living and also worked as a metalsmith. He even served under George Washington at Valley Forge in 1776. This was the year our nation gained it's independence.

Fitch traveled around a lot but he also spent quite a bit of time in Kentucky. He worked as a surveyor on Kentucky soil, observing and measuring the land between the Green River and the Ohio River. He later moved to Bardstown, Kentucky. Here, he traveled northeast to experiment with ideas that would eventually bloom into **(the)** very first steamboat.

On a hot summer's day in 1787, the first working American steamboat **(having these two “first steamboat” phrases so close together may cause a problem when trying to read it out loud, even with the word American in the second one. Can you think of a different wording?)** traveled down the Delaware River. John Fitch actually named her, *The Steamboat*. Unlike the Belle, this first steamboat did not have a paddlewheel. Instead, she had long oars **(attached to each side of the boat)** . This allowed her to **propel (not best word by itself either say “propel herself” or perhaps “move easily”?)** up and down the river. Four years later, Fitch received a patent for the invention of this very special water craft. The idea of a boat powered by steam was quite remarkable.

Steam is the Belle of Louisville's life-force. It gives her the power she needs to fight her way upriver against strong currents.

And where does this steam come from? It comes from the very water she sails...pumped straight from the river into her boiler system.

The steam is generated in the heart of the boat, the firebox. This can be a pretty hot place. Just ask the fireman. Now, this isn't your typical fireman who puts out fires. This fireman actually starts them... right here inside the firebox. But don't worry. He keeps close watch, so those burning flames don't get out of hand.

**(Interview Question for Fireman: Can you tell us what happens in the firebox and how the steam is generated through the boilers? Can you tell us about the fuel for the boat? And where does the steam go after leaving the boilers? What safety precautions do you have to observe?)**

Once the steam is produced it needs a place to go. The steam travels through a complex system of pipes between the boiler room and the engine room. In here, you will find many gauges and pressure valves to monitor the steam. But watch out...the pipes are hot. So, who

watches over the engine room? You may have guessed it...an engineer.

**(Interview Question for Engineer: Can you tell us about the engines? The pitman arms and the paddlewheel? How do they work together as a system to actually move the boat? Does the steam generated really supply the power to run the popcorn machine? And flush the toilets?)**

Possible Answer:

One of the most exciting parts of a steamboat is her paddlewheel. It's made of white oak and steel and is attached to the back of the boat.

The twin steam engines are attached to heavy wood and metal poles called pitman arms. The cranking of the pitman arms turn the large paddlewheel. The paddlewheel propels the boat forward and when the wheel reverses direction, it allows her to back up. (and anything else the engineer wants to include)

Now, with the arrival of the steamboat, more and more people were able to travel along the river systems. Because of this, river towns like Louisville grew bigger and bigger.

The steam generated isn't just for moving the boat. It's also for making music. That's right. The steam powers the calliope. What's a calliope, you might ask? Just take a listen.....(have calliope play a little song.)

The calliope is a musical instrument with thirty-two steam whistles. It's played with a keyboard and is similar to a pipe organ.

In fact, the first calliope was created for a church. When someone decided that the sound of the calliope was too loud, it was moved to a new home...the steamboat. The Belle could now use her unique calliope song to advertise her arrival.

**(Interview Question for Calliope Player: Can you tell us about the calliope on the Belle? Is it easy to play? Can you tell us about the relationship between the keyboard and the whistles?)**

### ***A BOAT OF MANY COLORS***

When the Belle of Louisville was first built in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, she was named the *Idlewild*. During those early days, the *Idlewild* served as a packet boat.

A packet boat carried cotton, lumber, livestock, and other cargo. The boats worked locally from their home port.

She served as a ferry boat between her home port of Memphis, Tennessee and West Memphis, Arkansas. Soon, trains and trucks became popular for transporting goods. Steamboats could go on to do other jobs. So, in the nineteen twenties, the *Idlewild* became mostly an excursion boat. Both children and adults jumped at the chance to catch a nice summer breeze from the river below.



Because of her popularity, she soon needed a make-over. Small improvements were made over time...like decorative crowns, which added spice to her smokestacks...and gingerbread trim, which dressed up her decks.

In the nineteen thirties, *Idlewild* found a brand new home...the port of Louisville, Kentucky... located on the south bank of the Ohio River. Here, people could take a wonderful cruise up and down the Ohio. They would often stop at popular attractions like Rose Island and Fontaine Ferry Amusement Park.

Steamboats also served as stages for big band dance cruises. In fact, the music style known as New Orleans jazz first entered the scene on steamboats. And guess which celebrity got his start on a steamboat? Louis Armstrong, the famous jazz musician!

Yes, steamboats loved the nightlife. During the Second World War, the *Idlewild* lifted the spirits of soldiers by serving as a floating nightspot. She also aided the war effort by towing oil barges on the Mississippi River.

After the war, the *Idlewild* was renamed the *Avalon*. She went back to being an excursion boat...and what a packed schedule she had. But that didn't slow her down. She not only traveled the Mississippi and Ohio rivers, but also many others, like the Kanawha, Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers. She made stops in over one hundred towns and at least nineteen different states. Now, for a paddlewheeler, that's a lot of paddling!

With all her traveling, the *Avalon* eventually showed years of wear and tear. But just as our nation changed a lot in the nineteen sixties, so did our favorite river steamer. The *Avalon* received a new owner, the city of Louisville. She was given a major overhaul, a new paint job, and once again, a brand new name, *The Belle of Louisville*.

Today, the *Belle* still proudly struts her stuff. She attends river parties and events like the Tall Stacks Festival in Cincinnati, across from Newport, Kentucky. But the Belle spends most of her days in

Louisville, where students enjoy field trips...teenagers dance the night away...families enjoy lovely lunch and dinner cruises. And some couples even get married on the *Belle*!

Ever wonder how a steamboat gets from one place to another? We already know that steam gives her power, but who is at the wheel? Meet \_\_\_\_, our pilot. He will show us around one of the most interesting spots on the boat, the pilothouse.

**(Interview Questions for the Pilot: Can you tell us what the wheel does? How do you communicate with others? Can you tell us the purpose of the bell and gong system? The whistle? The telegraph? What do you look out for when steering? Where are the brakes?)**

And just how does a boat this size turn around? Very carefully. Let's meet the man in charge...the captain. He makes sure everything

operates as planned . He'll explain how teamwork is needed to turn the *Belle of Louisville* around.

**(Interview Questions for the Captain: Can you tell us a little bit about teamwork on a steamboat? How many people does it take to turn a steamboat around? What does each person do? The deck hands? The crew? How do you and the pilot work together? What happens if someone doesn't do their part? How does everything on board work together in a system? )**

Now we've turned around, and it looks like we're heading back to dry land. It's been smooth sailing today. And from what we've seen, it certainly takes a team to make that happen. We've met workers in the engine room and the pilothouse. But what about the rest of the crew?

There are a few other workers here on board the *Belle of Louisville*. The purser takes care of concessions and souvenirs. She also takes

care of the passengers and makes sure they enjoy a very pleasant cruise.

**(Interview with Purser)**

As we mentioned earlier, the deck hands assist in the disembarking and landing of the boat. Now, let's meet the First Mate. He's second in command on a steamboat. He also oversees all deck operations and the docking of the boat. He'll tell us how we return to the wharf.

**(Interview Question for First Mate: Can you explain the process of returning to the wharf? What are the duties of the deck hands during this time? How do the captain and deck hands work together while returning to boat to the wharf? Can the boat get damaged?)**

Well, here we are, back where we started. What a wonderful cruise we had today. It's hard to believe there are only six operating river steamboats left in the country. And the *Belle* is the oldest one of them. In fact, she is even recognized as a National Historic

Landmark. And we can understand why. There's nothing quite like an authentic steamboat experience. We thank you for sailing with us on the *Belle of Louisville!*

###